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**INTERNATIONAL SOCIOLOGY TEXTS REVISITED:  
THE TREATMENT OF GENOCIDE IN TEXTBOOKS,  
1977-1990.**

by

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**Introductory sociology texts revisited:  
The treatment of genocide in textbooks, 1977-1990**

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## ABSTRACT

A survey of sixty (60) introductory sociology textbooks was conducted to see to what extent their authors pay attention to genocide, and in order to compare these findings with those of earlier textbook surveys. The books examined come from three university libraries in Montreal. Data was collected on the definitions, examples, discussions, and mentions of genocide in the table of contents, index and glossary. Attention was also given to the content of revised editions and Canadian texts. Less than half of the textbooks provided one or more paragraphs on genocide. While Helen Fein (1979) found that 39% of the textbooks in her study mention genocide, 42% in this study do so. The increase is particularly great in the last two years of the study which may be due to increasing attention paid to genocides by scholars as well as by the media.

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**INTRODUCTION**

When the United Nations' 1948 "Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide" defined the crime of genocide, they excluded political and social groups from the definition to assure the passage of this Convention (Kuper, 1981; Chalk, 1988). Since then, several scholars have modified the definition in order to make it more effective for the purpose of research (Dadrian, 1974; Chalk & Jonassohn, 1990; Fein, 1991). Regardless of genocide's definition however, it represents the greatest atrocity of our society; it continues to prevail, and has increased in frequency since World War II. This continued violation of human rights should be reason enough for sociologists to pay special attention to genocide. In this paper 60 introductory sociology textbooks will be examined for the extent to which their authors discuss genocide, and in order to compare these findings with those of earlier textbook surveys.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

Scholars who have surveyed introductory sociology textbooks for inclusion of genocide indicate that genocide



is inadequately represented (Fein, 1979; Glickman & Burdikoff, 1982; Pate, 1987). There has been no research published which is as exhaustive as Helen Fein's (1979) survey of the treatment of genocide in introductory sociology textbooks. Fein included three decades of American texts published between 1947 and 1977. She reported that just under half of the 58 books published between 1966 and 1977 included one or more focal<sup>1</sup> paragraphs on genocide. There was a substantial increase in the number of texts which included a description and explanation of genocide over the three decades of her study (table 2 in appendix). The number of textbooks making explicit reference to genocide increased from 25% to 47% between 1947 and 1977. Pleased as Fein was with these results, she was critical of the quality of the explanations and definitions provided.

Genocide is inadequately represented in the introductory texts of other disciplines as well. Only half of the 47 American history textbooks examined by Pate (1979)

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1 "A focal reference is the theme of the paragraph. These included paragraphs in which genocide is defined, related to another phenomenon, discussed as a generic phenomenon or a particular case is explained sociologically." In comparison, "peripheral referents might be direct (clear indications of events comprehensible to a student without historical background) or indirect (oblique indications or euphemisms assuming background on part of reader that would not be comprehensible to reader without such background.)" (Fein, 1979:179)

and published between 1967 and 1979, devoted a separate paragraph to the Holocaust. The average coverage was 12 lines (7 words per line) or 5 sentences. Relevant material was often scattered in various chapters of these books.

In a later article, Pate (1987) broadened his previous study by examining three introductory sociology textbooks published in the 1970's. He found that these textbooks dealt with historical anti-Semitism better than the history textbooks, but only two of the three texts provided information on the Holocaust and it was vague, brief and organized in a confusing manner.

Shiloh (1975) reported that genocide was more inadequately represented in psychological anthropology than in any other discipline. This researcher examined fourteen introductory textbooks in anthropology for an analysis of the Nazis and their genocidal behaviour. None of the textbooks, published between 1963 and 1974 mentioned the subject. Shiloh also reported having found little material on the Holocaust in well known monographs and periodicals in psychological anthropology. As a result of these findings, Shiloh said:

There appears to be almost universal agreement among these anthropologists that this phenomenon of human behavior - Nazi genocide - does not, cannot, or should not constitute an area for serious psychological anthropological study (1975:619).

Glickman and Burdikoff (1982) undertook a rigorous quantitative and qualitative study of history and social science textbooks utilized in Canadian secondary schools. They found that the Holocaust was inadequately treated in the 43 textbooks which qualified for analysis<sup>2</sup>. They noted, however, that the books used in Quebec and Alberta rated slightly better than those in the rest of Canada. When Glickman and Burdikoff polled a group of high school students in the Toronto area, they discovered that these students agreed with their findings, saying that they found these texts to have contributed little to their knowledge of the Holocaust.

The above mentioned research suggests that by the mid 1970's about half of the introductory textbooks surveyed were paying attention to genocide. Sociology texts appeared to be faring slightly better than those of other disciplines. The following survey of introductory sociology texts examines whether or not this trend continues into the late 1980's.

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<sup>2</sup>A textbook qualified if it dealt with the period of history during which the holocaust occurred or included a subject which was related to the Holocaust.

## METHOD

A systematic search of the holdings of the universities of Concordia, McGill and Montreal was conducted in order to locate a variety of introductory sociology texts. The table of contents, index and the text of each book were examined for mentions of genocide. If this word or one of its synonyms<sup>3</sup> was not located then the victims, perpetrators or locations of specific examples of genocide were sought out. Poorly indexed textbooks, with chapters on minority or ethnic issues, were skimmed for inclusion of genocide.

Fein's coding system (1977) was used to analyze the content. Any references in the textbook to genocide, or its synonyms, were identified as focal or peripheral. Focal was defined as a separate paragraph in which the concept genocide was clearly described and explained. If there were vague or indirect references to genocide (i.e the word genocide was not used but the concept is described and/or identified with specific case studies) then it was considered peripheral.

In addition, this survey noted the length of the discussion<sup>4</sup>, and whether or not definitions were provided in

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<sup>3</sup>annihilation or extermination

<sup>4</sup>Photographs were not counted.



The search produced a list of 60 textbooks published after 1976. Table 1 (in the appendix) lists these textbooks by year of publication and indicates which ones included a focal or peripheral discussion about genocide. A first examination of the data fails to exhibit any regular increase or decrease in their attention to genocide from one year to another. Nor is there a consistent pattern when the textbooks from Fein's (1979) and Buchanan's (1992) surveys containing focal or peripheral discussions on genocide are grouped together over 3 year periods (table 3). If, however, the number of texts providing one or more focal paragraphs on genocide between 1977 and 1990 are added together, we find that out of the 60 texts surveyed for this period, 42% included at least one focal paragraph on genocide. In Fein's study (1979), 39% of the 82 introductory sociology textbooks covered the subject in one or more focal paragraphs (table 2). There is also a noticeable increase in the number of

## FINDINGS

### a) Mentions of Genocide

the chapter or in the glossary. It also identified the victim groups of genocide, and listed the texts which included the word genocide or one of its synonyms in the index and the table of contents.



textbooks in 1989 and 1990 containing one or more focal paragraphs on genocide.

#### **b) Length**

It is not only important to know if authors of textbooks are paying attention to genocide, but also to know the length of the discussion on the subject. There is a big difference between a line, a paragraph, and a page on genocide in terms of what a reader will learn and remember about the subject. Although there is an increase in the number of textbooks containing one or more focal paragraphs on genocide, 23 of the 60 books examined make no mention of genocide. Among the 37 that do, 3 include only 1 line on the subject, 27 texts provide 1 to 3 paragraphs<sup>a</sup>, and only 7 devote 5 or more paragraphs to this topic. (See table 4 in the appendix.)

There does not appear to be a strong relationship between the publication date of the textbook and the length of discussion on genocide. Two of the 7 texts that include 5 or more paragraphs on genocide were written in the 1970's. The 3 other texts were all written in the late 1980's or in

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<sup>a</sup>The textbook with 9 lines has been included in this category.

1990. The three texts with 1 line on genocide were published between 1985 and 1989.

**c) Identification of genocide in index and table of contents**

In order to locate the section on genocide in a text, it is important that the word genocide or one of its synonyms be found in the table of contents and in the index. Twenty-seven of the introductory sociology textbooks include the words genocide, annihilation or extermination in the index.<sup>6</sup> Only 6 texts identified a section of a chapter in the table of contents with one of these headings. (See table 4 in the appendix.)

**d) Definition of Genocide**

Although introductory sociology texts are paying more attention to genocide, the definitions and explanations of genocide remain superficial and misleading. One text, written by Cargan and Ballantine (1979) refers to the killing of white settlers by Indians, but makes no mention of the massacres of the Indians by these settlers. Some

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<sup>6</sup> The section on genocide in the 10 other texts was located by looking through either the index for the names of victim groups or the table of contents for the chapter on minority issues. These identified pages were then skimmed for mention of genocide.

explanations are confusing because examples from a variety of time periods and geographical locations are lumped together. Worse yet, the relationship between the definition and case studies is not always clear. Occasionally, the ideas are scattered throughout the text and demand a great deal of effort on behalf of the reader to piece the ideas together.

Out of the 39 textbooks that provided its readers with end-of-chapter or back-of-the-book glossaries, 19 included a definition of genocide, annihilation or extermination (table 4 in the appendix). None of the textbooks cite any of the recently formulated definitions. Only Ritzer (1982 and 1990) cites the United Nations definition. Several times the definition is given in two or three sections of the text but further development of the concept is not undertaken. The role of the perpetrator is rarely identified in a clear manner.

#### **e) Victims of Genocide**

The cases with which the authors illustrate acts of genocide depend on the definition given in their text. The great variety of definitions employed explains the extensive list of victims of genocide generated from the survey of the textbooks. However, according to the parameters of the

definitions established by recent scholars (Fein, 1990; Chalk & Jonassohn, 1990) only 16 of the 25 identified groups can be considered victims of genocide. They are as follows: North American Indians, European Jews, Gypsies, Armenians in Turkey, Tasmanians, Cambodians, Hutu, Hawaiian natives, Karens of Burma, the victims of ancient Assyria, Brazilian Indians, Gays, Mental Defectives, and South American, Ache and Wassaja Indians (table 4 in appendix). An additional 9 groups were eliminated because they did not meet the established definition of genocide, even the restricted one by the United Nations. These groups are: Moslems, South Africans, Ibos, Kurds, Japanese Americans, the Hottentots, Caanites, and the Ugandan and Moskito Indians.

Only 2 of the 16 groups of victims are referred to frequently. Out of the 37 textbooks providing examples of victims groups 34 make reference to the persecution of Jews during the Holocaust. North American Indians are the next most cited group with 24 references. In comparison to Fein (1979), however, who noted that none of the texts she surveyed included the Armenian genocide, 3 of the textbooks in this study include the Armenians. Nevertheless, the less known twentieth century victims as well as older cases of genocide are all but ignored.

In terms of the number of references in each text, the



following data was tabulated from Table 4:

12 texts make reference to 1 victim  
9 texts make reference to 2 victims  
8 texts make reference to 3 victims  
5 texts make reference to 4 victims  
3 texts make reference to 5 victims

Often, these examples illustrate and follow a two or three line explanation of the concept genocide. Details of time and place are rarely included.

**f) Revised editions**

Fein's survey (1979) indicated that inclusion of genocide varied in the revised texts published in different decades. She noted that two authors included genocide in their texts in the mid 1960's but omitted the subject in their editions published in the 1970's. Two other authors do the reverse with their texts of the same decades. They do not include genocide in their 1960's editions but do address the subject in the following decade. Broom and Selznick, who published a revised edition of their 1963 text in 1977 make no references to genocide in either decade (Fein, 1979:190).

The present study examined 5 authors who had revised their textbooks between 1977 and 1990. Broom and Selznick published another edition of their sociology text in 1984 in which they once again omit genocide. Giddens does not include genocide in his 1982 edition, but does make



peripheral mention of the subject in 1989. Two editions of Haralambos were examined; in the 1985 text there is no mention of genocide, and in the revised version of 1990 only one line about the Holocaust. Teeven (1982 and 1989) includes one paragraph and the same examples in both editions. Ritzer (1982 and 1990) included focal paragraphs on genocide in both editions. Spencer (1981 and 1985) increases her discussion about genocide from one paragraph to two in the 1985 edition. She also includes a different definition of genocide and provides another example of a victim group.

The modifications to the texts indicate that some attempt is being made to include genocide. However, the changes are minimal, suggesting that the decision of whether or not to include genocide is related to the original objectives of the author more than the trends and current research in the field of sociology.

#### **g) Canadian textbooks**

Six textbooks, whose authors explicitly present a Canadian perspective on sociology, were examined for references to genocide (Teewan, 1982; Mansfield, 1982; Tepperman & Curtis, 1988; Lundy & Warne, 1988; Teevan, 1989; Hagedorn, 1990). Only Teevan's 2 texts (1982 and 1989)

contain focal discussions on genocide. The 4 other texts do not mention the subject. Although this is not a large sample of Canadian texts, it appears that most students using these Canadian content textbooks are not learning about basic concepts, such as genocide.

## DISCUSSION

### a) Helen Fein revisited

In 1979 Fein reported that there was a substantial increase in the number of introductory sociology textbooks published in the 1960's and 1970's that wrote about genocide. She hypothesized:

that sociologists' greater readiness to reflect upon genocides is accounted for by a wider willingness among western intellectuals to confront the Holocaust, an event which was for persons reaching adulthood before World War II the principal crime of the century. As the Holocaust recedes in history, energies expended in avoidance or "collective denial"... are released, generating a need for understanding and interpretation. (1979:183)

The results of this survey support this hypothesis. The number of textbooks paying attention to genocide has increased by 3% since 1977 and there is a substantial increase in the number of textbooks during the last two years of the study that write about genocide (table 1 in appendix). However, the length of text, the most commonly

identified victims of genocide, and the superficiality of the definitions have remained unchanged since Fein's study (1979).

**b) Introductory sociology textbooks and publishing control**

In order to explain the slow advancement of discussions on genocide, it is necessary to examine the larger picture of introductory sociology textbooks and the publishing industry. There are several sociologists who have examined the overall quality of introductory sociology textbooks. Perrucci (1980) examined forty introductory sociology textbooks, published between 1958 and 1977, and found that although the number of new and revised textbooks proliferated after 1973, the quality of the books did not improve. The basic structure and content of the textbooks changed very little from that of the two preceding decades. What changes there were, suggested that the quality of the introductory sociology textbook was slipping. Less space was provided for basic concepts, theories and methods as well as chapters on new and recent trends. There was a noticeable shift after 1973 to more conservative topics. Perrucci also noted that the references to the scholarly literature were dated and there was a shortage of references to current research. He concluded that introductory sociology texts do

not accurately reflect the diversity of views that exist in the field of sociology. Instead they promote the image that sociology is a well established and homogeneous science.

Coser (1982) supports Perrucci's conclusions and suggests that in publishers struggle to locate well written texts that organize a field of study, they have shifted from innovative texts to ones that are more conventional. He proposes that there is a relationship between the blandness of introductory sociology texts and the decline in individual authors who write textbooks for introductory sociology courses that they teach. Publishers have turned to house writers as professors have shifted from teaching general courses to specializing in their academic disciplines. Consequently, textbooks have become more predictable since the 1980's.

The quality of the introductory textbook should be of concern to sociologists. According to Perucci (1980), it is the primary teaching device through which students learn about the discipline. Research by Bradshaw and McPherron (1980) supports this statement by reporting that 90% of introductory sociology courses rely on textbooks. Furthermore, these texts are presented by authors and professors as representative of the field of study. As a result, the ideas contained in them can direct or influence



the discipline (Perrucci, 1980).

In terms of the study of genocide, clearly more texts should pay attention to the subject and more comprehensive coverage is necessary. Genocide must be described and explained explicitly if students are to understand what it is. As we have seen, there are many texts which provide superficial information about genocide or write about it in a confusing manner. Other textbooks tell about important cases, yet, omit an explanation of the generic concept, and forget to mention the fact that genocidal acts continue to occur. Genocide did not end with the Holocaust. It continues to prevail. We need to understand why and how it occurs, what are the mechanisms that motivate such brutal and horrifying acts of violence, and how bystanders passively comply with the perpetrators demands.

As sociologists, we should question why there is such limited recognition of genocide in introductory sociology texts. Are these authors reflecting their own views of what is relevant, or are they presenting what they perceive as the state of the discipline?

#### **c) Recommendations for further research**

It is crucial to continue monitoring introductory sociology textbooks in order to see if the increase in the



discussion of genocide continues. If this survey is replicated, there are several issues which may further contribute to the research on genocide in introductory sociology texts. First, the role of the perpetrator, as described in the texts should receive attention because it is as important for texts to report who carries out such crimes as it is to include the names of victim groups. Second, as the study of genocide continues to develop, it would be helpful to know to what extent authors are incorporating research findings and recent scholarly contributions into their textbooks. Who are better equipped than we, as sociologists, to further study the connections between scholars, textbook publishers and the general public's knowledge and understanding of genocide.

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<sup>6</sup>Starred textbooks indicate that there was no mention of genocide found. They are not included in table 4 of the appendix.



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## Appendix

Table 1: *Breakdown of texts according to date and type of references to genocide.*

| Date  | No. of Books | Focal | Peripheral | No References |
|-------|--------------|-------|------------|---------------|
| 1977  | 5            | 2     | 1          | 2             |
| 1978  | 3            | 2     | 1          |               |
| 1979  | 6            |       | 2          | 4             |
| 1980  | 1            | 1     |            |               |
| 1981  | 5            | 1     | 2          | 2             |
| 1982  | 5            | 3     |            | 2             |
| 1983  | 4            | 2     |            | 2             |
| 1984  | 2            | 1     | 1          |               |
| 1985  | 3            | 1     |            | 2             |
| 1986  | 1            |       | 1          |               |
| 1987  | 3            |       |            | 3             |
| 1988  | 6            | 2     | 1          | 2             |
| 1989  | 10           | 7     | 3          |               |
| 1990  | 6            | 3     |            | 3             |
| TOTAL | 60           | 25    | 12         | 23            |

Table 2: *Summary of recognition of genocide in introductory sociology texts by decade of publication (Fein, 1979)*

| Decade        | Total Texts Examined | Texts Exhibiting Recognition in One or More Focal Paragraphs |     |
|---------------|----------------------|--|-----|
| I 1947-1956   | 8                    | 2  | 25% |
| II 1957-1966  | 16                   | 3  | 19% |
| III 1967-1977 | 58                   | 27   | 47% |
| All Decades   | 82                   | 32   | 39% |



**Table 3: Summary of textbooks containing focal or peripheral discussions of genocide from 1947 to 1990, grouped together over three year periods.**

| Years         | Total no. of books examined | No. of books with focal or peripheral discussion of genocide |      |
|---------------|-----------------------------|--|------|
| 1988 - 1990   | 22                          | 16   | 76%  |
| 1985 - 1987   | 7                           | 2  | 29%  |
| 1982 - 1984   | 11                          | 7  | 58%  |
| 1979 - 1981   | 12                          | 6  | 50%  |
| 1976 - 1978   | 30*                         | 22*  | 73%  |
| 1973 - 1975   | 24                          | 16   | 67%  |
| 1970 - 1972   | 3                           | 3  | 100% |
| 1967 - 1969   | 4                           | 2  | 50%  |
| 1964 - 1966   | 7                           | 3  | 43%  |
| 1961 - 1963   | 9                           | 3  | 33%  |
| 1958 - 1960   | 1                           | 1  | 100% |
| 1955 - 1957   | 0                           | 0  | 0    |
| 1952 - 1954   | 2                           | 1  | 50%  |
| 1949 - 1951   | 3                           | 1  | 33%  |
| 1947 - 1948** | 3                           | 1  | 33%  |

\*Fein (1979) and Buchanan (1992) examined 4 of the same texts. Fein's copies have been subtracted from the total number of books examined between 1976 and 1978.

\*\*The texts have all been grouped into 3 year periods except for the first entry in the table which only covers 2 years.

Table 4: Analysis of the 37 introductory textbooks that discuss genocide

| AUTHOR                     | I* | TC* | GL* | LG*    | F/P* | V*          |
|----------------------------|----|-----|-----|--------|------|-------------|
| Anderson & Gibson (1978)   | -  | -   |     | 1PG    | P    | 1           |
| Babbie (1983)              | Y  | -   | Y   | 3PG    | F    | 1,2,3,12,13 |
| Biesantz et al (1978)      | Y  | Y   | -   | 1PG    | F    | 1,2         |
| Brinkerhoff & White (1988) | -  | -   | -   | 2PG    | P    | 1           |
| Broom et al (1984)         | -  | -   |     | 1PG    | P    | 2           |
| Charon (1989)              | -  | -   |     | 1LN    | P    | 1,2         |
| Cohen & Orbuch (1990)      | Y  | -   | Y   | 1PG    | F    | 2           |
| Defleur et al (1981)       | -  | -   | -   | 1PG    | P    | 1,2         |
| Doob (1988)                | Y  | -   | -   | 1PG    | F    | 2,5,8       |
| Fernandez & Barrile (1979) | Y  | -   | -   | 1PG    | P    | 2           |
| Giddens (1989)             | -  | -   | -   | 1PG    | P    | 2           |
| Goodman & Marx (1978)      | Y  | -   | Y   | 1PG    | F    | 1,2         |
| Haralambos (1985)          | -  | -   |     | 1LN    | P    | 2           |
| Hess et al (1988)          | Y  | -   | Y   | 1PG    | F    | 2           |
| Inciardi & Rothman (1990)  | Y  | -   | Y   | 2PG    | F    | 1,2         |
| Johnson (1989)             | Y  | -   | Y   | 1PG    | F    | 1,2,4       |
| Landis (1989)              | Y  | -   | Y   | 9LN    | F    | 2           |
| Liazos (1989)              | Y  | -   | Y   | 5PG    | F    | 1,2,14      |
| McGee et al (1977)         | Y  | -   | -   | 2PG    | P    | 1           |
| Persell (1984)             | Y  | -   | Y   | 1PG    | F    | 1,2,6       |
| Perrucci & Knudsen (1983)  | Y  | Y   | Y   | 3PP2PG | F    | 1,2,6,9     |
| Popenoe (1989)             | Y  | -   | Y   | 3PG    | F    | 1,2,4,10    |
| Preston & Smith (1989)     | Y  | Y   |     | 2PP    | F    | 2,5,16      |
| Ritzer et al (1982)        | Y  | Y   | Y   | 6PG    | F    | 1,2,3       |
| Ritzer et al (1990)        | Y  | Y   | Y   | 2PP    | F    | 2,3,4,7     |
| Robertson (1977)           | Y  | -   | Y   | 2PP    | F    | 1,2,5,7,11  |
| Rose et al (1977)          | Y  | -   | -   | 4PP    | F    | 2           |
| Shibutani (1986)           | -  | -   |     | 1LN    | P    | 2           |
| Spencer (1981)             | Y  | -   | Y   | 1PG    | F    | 1,2         |
| Spencer (1985)             | Y  | Y   | Y   | 2PG    | F    | 1,2,6,11    |
| Sullivan (1980)            | Y  | -   | Y   | 1PG    | F    | 1,2         |
| Teevan (1982)              | Y  | -   |     | 1PG    | F    | 1,2,3       |
| Teevan (1989)              | Y  | -   | -   | 1PG    | F    | 1,2,3       |
| Thio (1989)                | Y  | -   | Y   | 1PG    | F    | 1,2,5,7,11  |
| Wallace & Wallace (1989)   | Y  | -   | Y   | 1PG    | F    | 2,15        |
| Yorburg (1982)             | Y  | -   | -   | 2PG    | F    | 1,2,3,8     |
| Zeitlin (1981)             | -  | -   |     | 2PG    | P    | 1,2         |

## \*Key to Abbreviations

I = index

TC = table of contents

GL = glossary definition (blanks indicate that there is no glossary)

LG = length of material on genocide in text (PG represents the number of paragraphs, PP indicates pages, and LN lines)

Y = genocide, extermination or annihilation are included

F/P = focal or peripheral text on genocide

V = victims of genocide as coded below:

1)North American Indians, 2)European Jews, 3)Gypsies, 4)Armenians in Turkey, 5)Tasmanians, 6)Cambodians, 7)Hutu, 8)Hawaiian natives, 9)Karens of Burma, 10)victims of ancient Assyria, 11)Brazilian Indians, 12)Gays, 13)Mental Defectives, 14)South American Indians, 15)Ache Indians, 16)Wassaja Indians



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